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THE TRUTH ABOUT BULGARIA

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By

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By Alfred Stead

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THAT friendship with Bulgaria should be to-day one of the ideals of the British Foreign Office, seems almost inconceivable—it is, however, alas, only too true. "An understanding between Serbia and Bulgaria is essential to allied success in the Balkans," that is the idea. It must not be overlooked either that there exists also a desire to prove that those who said that Bulgaria was never going against the Allies were right, and it seems indifferent to these ignorant mandarins whether either a nation's word or an ally's existence be sacrificed so long as they are whitewashed. The more glaring the blunder in the past, the greater the need for saving their *amour propre* of ignorance. Thus there is to-day a very great danger of another blunder being added to the many we have been guilty of in Balkan matters. Our pledges to Serbia are to be ignored, the Bulgarians are to be taken into our arms, rank though they be with the blood of our soldiers and the blood and honour of a nation allied to us. It is a pretty picture, worthy of inclusion in one of those German cinema series, showing Germans feeding starving Belgian or Serbian children! It is a national disgrace to think about it; but what of that: What shall it profit the British nation if it keeps its own soul, but gain not Bulgaria? And so real interests and vital obligations are imperilled in order that the rotting, immoral, marauding Bulgarian people may form the corner-stone of our Balkan policy.

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We are wonderfully conservative in this country. Bulgaria has been adopted in our ideas as a Gladstonian tradition; the Bulgarians have cleverly builded on this foundation and to-day it is very hard to disabuse the minds even of those in authority to fixed ideas. Before the war a handful of interested nonentities lent themselves to the work of bamboozling British political and public opinion on Bulgarian subjects—the baneful effects still remain, and as if this were not bad enough these self-advertisers, not yet free from the trammels cunningly cast about them by the astute Ferdinand of Sofia, are actively working for a *rapprochement* with Bulgaria. We believed them before, to our cost, when they said that Bulgaria was with us, although every non-interested and competent authority was convinced that Bulgaria was bound by interest and inclination to the Germans and Austrians. It is probable that, true to fatuous tradition, they are still believed in more quarters than one. They had the effrontery to circularise the members of the British Parliament, after Bulgaria was at war with the country, recking nothing of the damning fact that Bulgarian rifles had fired on British soldiers and that by the list of British casualties in Macedonia a wall of insurmountable impossibility was being built brick by brick against any treating with the traitors. Have they not enough on their consciences—the terrible slaughter of Gallipoli, the heroic struggle of Townshend of Kut, the wiping out of Serbia—is not this enough to satisfy them that they are important political factors, or do they wish more victims before they are glutted? Every person who to-day seriously advocates dealing with Bulgaria is a traitor to the national honour; even Roger Casement had more excuse than they. And the terrible part of it is that when events have proved that Bulgaria cannot be snatched like a brand from the burning these misguided men, led by the Brothers Buxton, descending from their high trapeze of misinforming authority, hope to fall comfortably into the safety-net of honest disinterestedness. And we will probably watch them do it, may even applaud. Let them save

themselves, but let those who hold dear the honour of Great Britain save the country from haggling with the Bulgarians, selling the pound of Serbian flesh to gain nobody knows what.

Of course, it must be out of the question to give Macedonia to Bulgaria ; the argument that, before the Balkan wars, Serbia was ready to forego much of this territory and that during the present war, under unjustifiable pressure from her allies, she was ready to hand part of Macedonia to Bulgaria, has nothing to do with the situation to-day. Bulgaria, by joining the camp of our enemies, has forfeited all right to any concessions whatever ; she has earned the right of being wiped off the map. It is doubtful whether we have any more ardent enemies than the Bulgarians in the ranks of our adversaries—the outlaw who has committed the basest of crimes must necessarily fight to the end against the forces of law and order. It palliates nothing that Bulgaria appears more base because of the incredible stupidity and blindness of the Allies before the open declaration of war. Bulgaria has for years been pro-Austrian, and every year has seen the last traces of Russian influence, based on a supposed gratitude of a notoriously ungrateful savage people, grow less and less. Under the rule of Ferdinand the whole tendency of Bulgaria has been towards Austria ; the whole of the army and the governing circles, those puppets of the throne, have been Austrianised. The writing was on the wall for all to read, but we preferred to believe the soft words and sweet singing of that wonderful *causeur*, Ferdinand of Coburg, the ruler of Bulgaria.

Ferdinand has never had any sympathies with Russia —always with Austria and Hungary. England he had never forgiven the slights he imagined he received during the reigns of Queen Victoria and King Edward. The semi-divine beliefs of the German Emperor appealed to him—he considered himself a missionary of German civilisation amongst barbarians. Jesuitism was born in him, and the black fathers from Vienna or Buda-Pest had more sway over this brilliant coward than any other

force, save, perhaps, his vices. Surrounded by his sycophants—his Tammany Hall political leaders—fattening on his connivance in the corruption flourishing in the lack of a moral atmosphere, Ferdinand had gauged to a nicety the psychology of these descendants of Tartar marauding tribes. He ruled them by fear, just as their chiefs did in the Middle Ages, and wasted no kindness on them—we might well have taken a lesson from him and recognised that the only way to do anything with Bulgarians is by force—to treat with them is regarded as a sign of weakness. Destruction, spoliation, and robbery the Bulgarians understand; State construction, national or individual morality they have not even yet had any temptation to study. In the army only officers were promoted who stood well at court, and only Austrophil officers could be welcomed there. The coming of the new era of liberal ideas in Russia was only another proof to Ferdinand that nothing should be sought in Petrograd. He wanted a corrupt, illiterate people, with still more corrupt politicians—not an educated mass able to think. He has always had the true Austrian mediæval ideas as to the value of ignorance to those who wished to govern autocratically. The ruler of the Bulgars has followed a real policy, not caring for any scruples, for any correctness, or for any engagements. And this is the ruler of the nation we expect to seduce from the ranks of the enemy. For, save Ferdinand, nobody counts at Sofia except his German masters, who have the situation well in hand. Why should we imagine that the Germans trust the Bulgarians and will let there be any chance of treating with us? To assassinate Ferdinand might have been useful before the war, to do so now is useless. There are ten political parties in Bulgaria, all under the thumb of Ferdinand and all most whole-heartedly for Germany, even the formerly most Russophil. To treat is, therefore, only to hold ourselves up to derision, to strengthen the Bulgarian belief in the victory of the Central Powers, and do infinite harm to our prestige throughout Europe.

We must not forget, in dealing with this question, that Bulgaria undoubtedly believes that Germany is winning, if she has not already won, the war. It is therefore foolish to believe that Bulgaria is in despair because she is not with us. We must swallow the bitter pill and realise that she is glad to be with the Central Powers because she thinks they are winning. If the Bulgarians thought we were winning they would be unhappy, and we should have to bolt the doors to prevent her emissaries coming to treat for surrender. Of course, it is wonderful for anyone to *want* to be on the other side, but Bulgaria undoubtedly does. What is Bulgaria anyway? A king, whole-heartedly Austrian, a camarilla, of unscrupulous, suspicious politicians, readier than Polonius to accept the suggestions of their king, and a mass of unthinking peasants who only know that they have Macedonia and that Serbia has been wiped out. Bulgaria to-day believes that "what exists is the incontestable military and political supremacy of Germany and her allies, who are preserving their initiative and their strength intact." Nor is it to be wondered at that Bulgaria believes that her allies are victorious—facts support German arguments and distance makes it difficult for the slowly-growing might of Germany's enemies to be appreciated. If Berlin believes that half London is in ruins from Zeppelin bombs, as it undoubtedly does, what must not Sofia think? We must therefore take as a basis of discussion of Bulgarian action the fact that the Bulgarians are probably more confident of ultimate victory being on their side than are many Germans or even Englishmen. Any attempt to lure them from their allies, by promise of the concession of bloodstained Macedonian districts where British and French life-blood has mingled with Serbian, only makes the Bulgarians think that their support is needed to save the Allies from Germany's might, and convinces them that Berlin is surer of victory than London. Bulgaria has always taken readiness to negotiate as a confession of weakness. Ethelred the Unready, with his proffers of blood-money to buy off invasion, was

probably more likely to be successful than those who would seek to barter with Bulgaria to leave the enemy's camp and make peace. The Pact of Berlin, by which no enemy country can make separate peace, is still more potent perhaps than the Pact of London, because on Vienna, Budapest, Sofia and Constantinople, lies the mailed fist of the principal signatory. As the Bulgarian Prime Minister said, on Feburary 16th, 1916: "We Bulgars are working with our allies for the common cause. We do not recognise any separate interests. Whatever is important to our allies is important to ourselves likewise."

Ferdinand and his Bulgarians have two ideals—to crush Serbia and to have a common frontier with Austria-Hungary—nothing less than this can satisfy the Coburger, and now that he has tasted the pleasures of possession he is far less likely to wish to forego them. And however ready we may be to sell our Ally's flesh and blood to gain the smiles of the Syren of Sofia, we cannot give him all he wants. From the start we could never pay his price, only Germany could, which was the best of reasons why Ferdinand was bound to go with the Central Powers.

Nor must we overlook the fact that the Bulgarians have a tremendous opinion of their own importance, and for us to treat with them means that their heads would swell still more, and make terms still more impossible. Already they announce that Bulgaria needs "neither French empty ostentation, British brutality, nor Russian passivity." They also announce that "on account of the intervention of Bulgaria, Asquith and Grey lost their heads, and there is no more trace in them of their past mastership." It must be confessed that the published opinions of Bulgaria as to this country are scarcely flattering to our pride, nor indicative of any undue desire on the part of Sofia to be pleasant. The following three extracts give some idea, and there are more extreme ones easily to be found: "Great Britain, who believes that the world was created to be her slave, must renounce her ideal of a future

ruling all the seas and all the nations. The British must be made to feel God's wrath for having grieved the blameless heart of Bulgaria!" Or, "We know the shameless and rapacious politics of Great Britain under the yoke of which over 300 millions of people are groaning. From the time of Beaconsfield at the Berlin Congress we have learnt what the integrity of a nation means for Great Britain." Nor is the prospect for us very cheering if we are to believe Bulgarian views. "Great Britain is called upon to answer for its sins to God and humanity. First of all the British Government is now exposed to the judgment of public opinion of its own state. What can Great Britain do? Nothing else but to be crushed, destroyed, and annihilated by the smaller nations led by Germany. That is the situation of Great Britain." Nor is this extract of the reply, in the Bulgarian Parliament this year to the King's speech, soothing to our military pride: "The armies of the two great Powers, Great Britain and France, who entered martyred Macedonia with the disgraceful intention of strengthening and consolidating the terrible rule of Serbian tyranny, were met with unexampled heroism by our brave Bulgarian armies, who fell upon the enemy with the tempestuous fury of a hurricane and put him to panic-stricken flight."

To endeavour to treat with people who think like that would not only be a mistake, it would be foolish. Nor are more potent arguments wanting. If we treat with Bulgaria seriously we risk not gaining Roumania—we gain nothing with Bulgaria, save smirching our national honour and a worn-out second-rate army. In losing Roumania we lose 600,000 men, well trained in war, fully officered, with trained reserves of another 500,000 men. All these strategically placed where they can do the most good. What will it avail us to have bought Bulgarian remnants if it means the loss of Odessa and South Russia? The opening of the Dardanelles even would then read like a sorry jest, and not be worth striving for. To lose Roumanian support when the opportune moment comes may well be to condemn

Russia and her armies to permanent activity or even permanent retreat. Feeding war stories to Russia by Archangel or Vladivostok is like bottle-feeding an infant through the full length of a garden hose. The Southern inlet must be available before Russia can come to her full strength, and if Odessa goes, not only is the whole Russian battle-line compromised, but the vital question is raised of the possibility of adequate further Russian military participation in the war. The Roumanian army is the great stake in the war to-day—it may well be the decisive stake—representing two million men on balance. Are we going to throw this away in order to attempt to prove that those were right who said the Bulgarians were for us even if their ruler was not? We cannot prove that, however much we may pay the Bulgarian cut-throats to betray their present allies, but we may put the coping-stone on the edifice of catastrophic blunders in the Balkans. We must choose, and choose quickly.

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